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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses ways in which the Queensland University of Technology (Australia) has freed up resources, particularly staffing resources, in order to focus attention on activities that add value to the academic process. Vendor partnership with Blackwell's Library Supply company for selection, acquisition, cataloging, and end processing of monographs and serials is described. Other ways to relieve staffing pressures are noted, including automation of clerical tasks (e.g., self check out, self reservation, and self renewal) and partnership with other libraries in resource sharing (e.g., interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing). Emerging critical roles for library staff are then addressed, including: working with academics to ensure appropriate inclusion of information seeking (whether via print or electronic means) in courses offered in flexible delivery mode; seeking out membership in course development teams and faculty teaching and learning committees; and supporting the research activities of university staff and students. (MES)

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# LIBRARIES IN PARTNERSHIP : DEFINING OUR CORE ROLES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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Today's university libraries are facing some of their greatest ever challenges, as we make the transition to an electronic age. In many countries, government sector funding to universities is declining. Within universities, resourcing for libraries is now, in many cases, competing with resourcing for student information technology laboratories and the demands of multi media teaching. As student learning moves increasingly to mechanisms based on the Internet, many policy makers and administrators query the continuing relevance of library services to the teaching and learning process. Whilst such assumptions may seem naive to the experienced librarian, it is often such simplistic views which influence the financial support provided to libraries to fulfil their mission.

In order to confirm our role within the new models of teaching and learning now being developed, libraries will need to focus their attention on activities which add value to the academic process, activities which enhance this process in a way which cannot be equally or better performed by other agencies. Traditionally, academic libraries have seen their core business as being acquisition, cataloguing, processing, and lending of materials, and assisting readers with specific information queries. Although for many years libraries have co-operated in, and outsourced, the provision of cataloguing records, most other activities have been performed in-house, often using manual, labour intensive methods to handle physical information artefacts. Today, in contrast, a growing percentage of information used by libraries is not housed within the library building at all. Such information is increasingly, in fact, available direct to the individual scholar's workstation. Even that material which is physically housed in a library building can be obtained, and managed, in ways not imagined fifty years ago. In such an environment, what is the core business of the university library? How does it add value to the information chain? Will this be further impacted by the new models of learning being developed within universities, particularly those leading to flexible delivery of curriculum content?

University libraries can integrate their services into such new learning models, particularly if they work in partnership with academics and with other specialists. However, libraries will require resources, particularly staffing resources, to accomplish this. At a time when funding support is static or reducing, such resources can only be generated by releasing them from other work within the library.

A number of Australian libraries have been investigating alternative means to free up such resources. Outsourcing of activities has increased, and some libraries have moved to serial consolidation services. Such initiatives have, however, not always resulted in the maintenance of the service quality which the library supplied previously to its clients. Two Australian university libraries, Griffith University and the Queensland University of Technology, both located in Brisbane, have embarked on a different course to ensure the release of library resources from technical processing areas, while maintaining a high standard of library service. Both libraries decided to enter into partnerships with library vendors, following recommendations from external consultants. Each, independently, chose the Blackwell's Library Supply company to share this partnership.

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The concept of vendor partnership is a critical element in the philosophy of Total Quality Management. The founder of this philosophy, W. Edwards Deming recommended as one of his 14 key points:

> "Develop long-term relationships with a limited number of suppliers, based on loyalty and

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trust" [1]

Such a concept requires that the vendor and the client organisation work together to ensure the streamlining of work processes, and to locate tasks at the point where it is most logical and cost effective for them to be performed.

At QUT, we have pursued this philosophy. We have developed a vendor partnership which:

- guarantees the vendor a large proportion of our (not inconsiderable) business. 70% of monograph purchases and 90% of our paid serial subscriptions (ie most commercial publications), are channelled through Blackwell companies.
- allows direct ordering by the library on to the vendor database, including necessary electronic transfer of information back to the library's inhouse system.
- supplies catalogue records from the vendor, or via Australia's National Bibliographic Database, direct to the QUT library system.
- provides end processing services (at a cost), and direct delivery of materials to branch libraries, bypassing the need for much of the material to transit the Technical Services Sections.guarantees the library a significant discount on normal pricing, in exchange for the substantial increase in business volume.

Once fully in place the process for acquisition of library materials at QUT will be:

**MONOGRAPH PROCESS**

Selection on vendor database (collection manager)
Automatic Record created in in-house system
Automatic triggering of order to vendor
Order fulfilment by vendor
MARC record generated (includes invoice data)
Book end processed by vendor
MARC record and invoice data automatically downloaded to in-house system
Book delivery direct to branch library (with packing slip)
Invoice and packing
Book checked against packing slip
Slip reconciled
Invoice payment
Book shelved

**SERIALS PROCESS**
**(Consolidation)**

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Serials order generated on Connect database
Order forwarded by vendor to publisher
Serial issues delivered to vendor
Missing issues claimed by vendor
Invoice data automatically downloaded to in-house system
Issues shipped weekly as freight direct to branch libraries (with packing slip)
Invoice payment
Issues shelved (sample checking against packing slips)
Check-in undertaken from packing slips

In order to streamline the selection process, collection profiles for QUT Library needs have been be established on the Blackwell's Collection Manager database, and approval plan/blanket ordering will be instituted wherever practicable.

From the point of view of QUT Library, this new partnership has already resulted in substantial price reduction in purchase prices of acquired materials. It will increase the speed of order generation, and of material delivery. Even more importantly, it has already, and will in the future, release staff resources previously assigned to technical processing work. This will enable us to transfer such resources to the new roles which are becoming increasingly important if the library is to increase its interaction with its community.

As outsourcing and vendor partnership begin to relieve staffing pressures in acquisition and processing functions, so can patron self check out machines, self reservation, self renewal, etc., relieve loans function staff demands. Much routine clerical processing can, these days, be automated or even, in some circumstances, outsourced. Many Australian libraries are now transferring their lending systems to patron operated self check-out machines. Once these become the standard means of generating loans of library materials, lending services staff will be only required to deal with complex loan operations or client problems. Such mechanisms, can, like bank Automatic Teller Machines, release further staffing resources. These resources can then be redeployed into areas where they do create added value to library services. Partnership with other libraries in resource sharing (including interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing) can enhance such service levels.

As traditional library roles transform, however, different critical roles emerge for academic library staff. Use of the Internet has opened up new means of teaching and learning. The impact of teleteaching, distance education and teaching on the Web on the form of university education will be profound. Once, the delivery of courses in "distance education" mode was provided chiefly for geographically isolated students. Today, universities across the globe are experimenting with needs for flexible study options, whether such students be locally based, geographically isolated, or resident on the other side of the world. There is a danger that such electronically "packaged" courses will obviate the need for information searching behaviour by the student. Without the need to learn how to locate, sift, prioritise and integrate information, student learning becomes little more than rote repetition of facts. In terms of lifelong learning, such an approach removes the acquisition of critical long term skills. One of the important new roles for university library staff, therefore, will be to work with academics, and other relevant specialists, to ensure the appropriate inclusion of information seeking (whether via print or electronic means) in courses offered in flexible delivery mode. Librarians need to ensure that the intended outcomes of particular instructional units include the acquisition of information literacy skills by students.

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As Steele points out in a paper to an Australian government sponsored seminar on Resource Based Learning:

> "...it seems likely that there will be a move away from designing courses and then expecting the library to supply appropriate learning materials, to designing courses around the availability of appropriate electronic documents and networked resources. Librarians will need to develop a high level of comprehension of the educational perspectives of academic staff and find a suitable mechanism for appropriate dialogues." [2]

Teaching staff are increasingly coming to recognise that course development in flexible mode requires specialist skills. Teaching staff may rightly claim subject discipline expertise. However, many are now willing to admit the need to work with specialist educational technologists with the skills necessary to mount effective units/subjects on the World Wide Web. It is critical for the creation of positive educational outcomes that librarians ensure that they also become part of such teams, and that their roles as information content specialists are similarly recognised within this process.

Librarians can no longer afford to remain within the walls of the library building, waiting for clients to seek them out. The librarian's skill must now be taken to the client. The place for an academic librarian in the future will be outside the Library building, actively involved with the academic community. Most Australian university libraries have adopted the concept of "liaison librarians", professional staff whose primary responsibility is to work with the staff of a particular faculty or academic department, in order to ensure that the information needs of the academic unit are being met by the library service. One Australian university, the Curtin University of Technology, has even trialed the of concept of basing liaison librarians physically within the faculty building, rather than in the Library, in order to increase this personal interaction. Many other Australian university libraries are similarly experimenting with alternate means of linking librarians integrally into academic developments.

In order to integrate itself into the academic process fully, the University Library needs to seek opportunities to establish its value as a partner in course development and delivery. Liaison librarians should seek out membership of Course Development teams and of faculty Teaching and Learning Committees. Librarians must come to be seen as equal partners with teaching staff in these fields - a difficult, but critical, achievement.

Can librarians add value to such groups? Certainly, provision of advice on how to locate resources to support program content is important (the "resource professional" role). However, equally important is the need to ensure that the way in which the curriculum is constructed encourages student research, information seeking, evaluation and synthesis, rather than simply feeding back specific data in rote fashion. Teaching staff need to be convinced that developing courses which impart skills to facilitate further learning in their field is critical to any academic program. There is a need for librarians to ensure that the building blocks of lifelong learning are laid within such courses.

In providing critical infrastructure for the university of future, the academic library's outreach activities will be enhanced by operating in liaison and course support teams, working along side IT support personnel and educational technologists. The skills of these three groups are today indispensable to the formulation of flexible courses based on a combination of online, print and audiovisual technologies. By developing teams which can work in partnership with academics, new learning models can be developed which combine the best aspects of educational design with important information resource strategies.

Support for the research activities of university staff and students can similarly benefit from input from such multi-skilled teams. There exists in research, as in the teaching arena, a naive view that the skills of the academic librarian will in future become irrelevant, as unmediated information delivery becomes the norm. It is suggested that the academic will interact directly and effectively with her/his relevant sources of research information. Such views ignore the limited personal capacity of most teaching and research staff to manage the burgeoning flood of literature available electronically in their field. The need for skilled information navigators to guide, train, and, at times, to mediate for users, remains significant. Academic librarians are ideally placed to fulfil this role. Often, they will need to work with research clients individually. They will develop in-house specific subject gateways, adapt external gateways for

best local use, seek out and advise on appropriate information resources (both print and URLs). In some ways they will act as general faculty research advisers, research advisers operating at a high professional level. The best self help mechanisms for resource users may well be developed in-house, whilst drawing heavily on globally available tools, such as international Internet subject gateways. Again the concept of working in partnership with teaching staff to facilitate improved research processes and outcomes is critical.

The traditional university library must today provide innovative solutions to significant challenges - challenges to its continuing relevance, and to its very existence. The use of vendor partnerships, automation, and outsourcing arrangements, can help to release the resources required to make this transition. It is up to library managers to use these resources creatively. We must seek opportunities to work with teaching staff, and with other specialists, in internal partnerships to develop new models of learning for the Internet age.

What is our new core business? This will only become clear over time. However, the value which librarians can add to processes such as course development and delivery will require continuing interaction with others across the university. The establishment of external and internal partnerships are an important step in this. If such partnerships fail to materialise, it will be the educational outcomes for our students which will, ultimately, suffer.

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2. Steele, C at http://online.anu.edu.au/caul/steele.htm

I certify that this contribution is original. It has not been copied from, or published, elsewhere.

However, I wish to note that the second half of this paper draws heavily on a paper prepared for the conference New missions of Academic libraries in the 21st Century, to be held at Peking University, Beijing, 25 - 28 October, 1998. GAYNOR AUSTEN

## BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS

Gaynor Austen is Director of Library Services at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia (1991+).

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